

**Toward Cultural Proficiency:
A Course for Preservice Educators, Communicators, and Leaders**

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

“ Seek to Understand, Then Be Understood” (Covey, 1989).

Educators who first seek to understand are able to demonstrate their desire for deep understanding by creating learning environments in which learners’ unique qualities and characteristics are integrated into the classroom. Since the United States is continuously changing in demographics, educators need to be prepared to understand unique learning characteristics that are prevalent among learners from those demographics.

It was during a pre-service educator workshop on diversity, that it was realized that all of the pre-service educators, communicators and leaders in a department at a large Midwestern land grant university needed more exposure to, awareness of, and strategies for recognizing their own potential biases, and how those biases might unknowingly lead to potential exclusion rather than inclusion of all learners in their learning environments. In order to fulfill the need, an innovative idea for a course was created to help students progress along their cultural proficiency continuum. The course was initially designed for pre-service educators in Agricultural Science Education. However, the need was more than department-wide.

After the College-wide Diversity Catalyst Team conducted a climate survey, they implemented the following goal for the college: “to create a supportive environment that is welcoming to all individuals and to recruit and retain greater numbers of ... students from segments of the population currently underrepresented”

(<http://extensionhr.osu.edu/diversity/cas/climatesurveysum.pdf>). To accomplish the goal, preservice educators, communicators and leaders must be able to create inclusive environments. One approach to preparing educators to understand learners from various demographics is to incorporate cultural proficiency education into the university-wide general education curriculum (<http://didyouknowpublishing.com/woventraditions.html>).

The purpose of the study was to describe the perceptions of students enrolled in a cultural proficiency class toward their journey on the cultural competence continuum.

How it Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps

To achieve the goal of becoming an inclusive society, a cultural proficiency course, Agricultural and Extension Education 594 was written to use assignments as a means toward the goal. Many assignments were adopted from the Woven Traditions Toolkit, and are based on development in the affective, rather than cognitive domain. The assignments move learners through six domains in the Woven Traditions Toolkit. The domains are designed to guide learners through grasping and understanding culture and its effects on human development. In addition, standards and benchmarks listed in the Toolkit were used to provide evidence of changes in behavior.

The first assignment was assessing learners’ Pre-Confidence using a questionnaire. In addition, learners wrote journal entries once per week that reflected on ideas and questions that they encountered each week. Learners used “critical thinking stems” to begin their entries each week. There were also Daily Reflections at the beginning of every class; learners were presented with a prompt, selected by their peers, in which they reflected and wrote for 8-12 minutes.

Culture is closely tied to music, so to explore different cultures, learners participated in a Behind the Music project. Learners researched a genre of music and the culture associated with the music, and presented a PowerPoint to the rest of the class showing what they learned. This same concept was applied to books during Book Club. The learners read a book and presented it to the rest of the class discussing its significance. In addition, pop culture was explored when each learner nominated a movie that they believed could teach something about culture. One movie, from the nominees, was watched and reflected upon.

Two assignments, the I am From Poem and the Racial Autobiography were used for learners to become aware of their own cultural identity. The I am From Poem was a creative and expressive way to discover one's background and unique characteristics that make up one's individual culture. The Racial Autobiography explored how and why one acts certain ways in certain cultural settings.

Since the course was about real world experiences, the learners were responsible for participating in three Dialogues/Discussions presented by The Ohio State University Multicultural Center. The participants took notes and wrote brief papers summarizing the discussion. Learners also joined an OSU Indian student at a local Indian restaurant to be exposed to traditions of cultures other than their own.

The biggest assignment of the course was the Service Learning Project. The pre-service educators were responsible for creating a project in which they taught others about culture and its affect on society. The final exam was a reflective and expressive exam. Lastly, the Post-Confidence questionnaire was completed.

Results to Date/Implications

Students enrolled in the course earned a Certificate in Intercultural Awareness and Community Engagement Learners from the OSU Multicultural Center, a first for the College. Second, students implemented service learning projects. Their sphere of influence, through their projects, reached: Greene County Future Educators of Tomorrow members, Logan County Junior Fair Board members, OSU Collegiate 4-H members, Pre-service teacher educators (Ph.D.) enrolled in Ed P&L 928, River View High School freshman through senior Agricultural Science students, OSU Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity, Canal Winchester High School senior health classes, and Metro High School students. The eight students enrolled in the course had an impact to approximately 160 other people, thus creating a ripple effect of their cultural proficiency education. Third, instruments were used to determine the students' progress along the cultural proficiency continuum to report a significant statistical difference. Students enrolled in a cultural proficiency course have a better confidence toward multicultural proficiency. Preservice educators, communicators, and leaders need to gain a better understanding of culture and be exposed to their cultural competence continuum. If they progress on the continuum, then they can create a better learning environment. The following graphs show the impact of the course on the students in their confidence in cultural competence. Further data will be collected and analyzed after the course is repeated.

Null hypothesis:

$$H_0: \mu_D = 0$$

Decision rule:

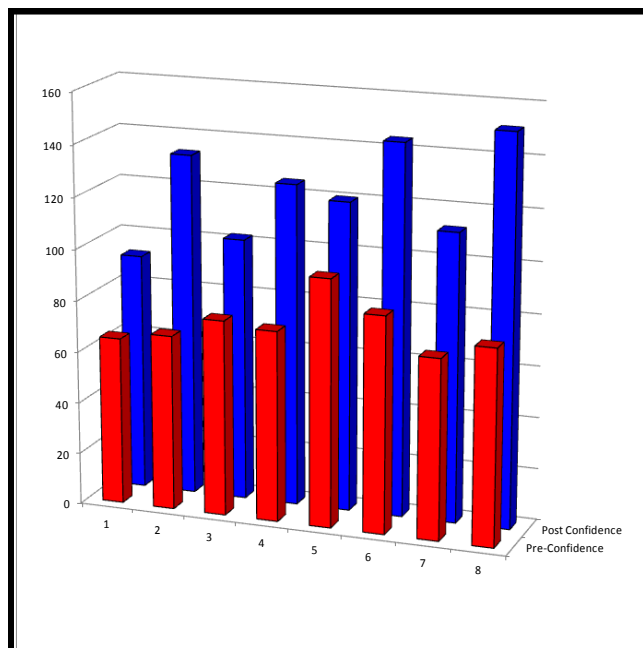
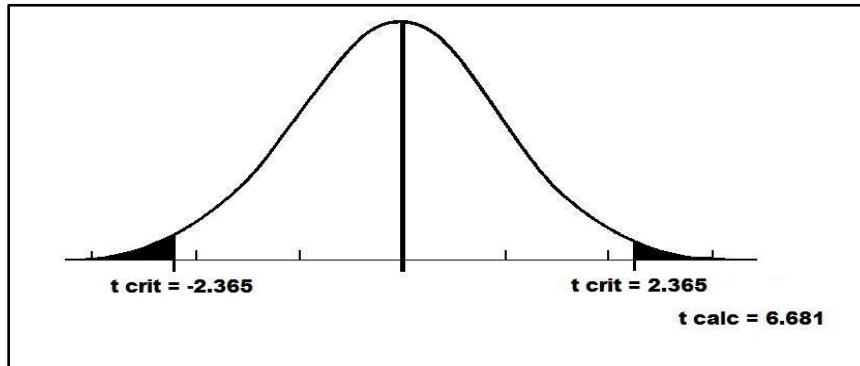
Reject the null hypothesis (H_0) at the .05 level of significance, if t_{calc} is equal to or more negative than -2.365 or equal to or more positive than 2.365 given 7 degrees of freedom.

Decision:

Reject the null hypothesis (H_0) at the .05 level of significance, because t_{calc} is equal to or more positive than 2.365 given 7 degrees of freedom.

Interpretation:

Participating in AEE 594, “Toward Cultural Proficiency” did make a significant statistical difference in pre-service educators’ confidence toward multicultural proficiency.



Given the potential impact the course could have on undergraduate student confidence in multicultural proficiency, the course was submitted to The Ohio State University Office of Academic Affairs to be approved as a general education requirement for the university. The course, Community Leadership (COMLDR) 3535, “Toward Cultural Proficiency, was approved to meet the “Cultures and Ideas” category in the following ways: To fulfill two GEC categories: **GEC 2. Breadth: C. Arts and Humanities;** (3) **Cultures and Ideas** and **GEC 4. Diversity (1) Social Diversity in the U.S.** Below is the approved rationale for both of these categories.

GEC 2. Breadth: C. Arts and Humanities; and (3) Cultures and Ideas Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students develop abilities to analyze, appreciate, and interpret major forms of human thought and expression.
2. Students develop abilities to understand how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior.

How do the course objectives address the GEC category expected learning outcomes?

Cultural proficiency study is grounded in a social constructionist paradigm, meaning that it recognizes that discourse creates reality rather than merely describing it. Therefore, questions about “reality/realities” and the norms that guide human behavior are at the heart of cultural proficiency studies, and therefore, permeate every aspect of the course. The course is designed to teach students to consider ways in which norms about human behavior emerge from particular social practices and beliefs, and why those practices and beliefs have been challenged by some, but ignored by others. James Banks, a founding figure in the field of multicultural education stated that, “I think if we’re going to have people participate as citizens in a democratic society, they have to have the skills and knowledge and the racial attitudes needed to work with people from diverse groups” (p. 3). Obviously, no single course could teach the entire range of topics needed to prepare society to work in diverse groups, but every offering of this course will touch on many of them. In addition, the course will provide students with considerable practice in applying the theory that is being presented, through class discussions, written assignments, and service-learning engagement and practice.

How do the readings assigned address the GEC category expected learning outcomes?

The readings have been selected to introduce students to some of the founding principles in cultural proficiency studies—for example, extended and rigorous analysis of social norms, especially those related to race, and challenges to political views and decisions, especially historically that have created our current cultural norms. In Wu & Martinez (2006) “Taking cultural competency from theory to action”, the author provide readers with challenges that lay a foundation for topics in the class such as “defining and recognizing unconscious bias”, and “What does culture have to do with this conversation?”. In addition, Thompson’s (2007) *Up Where We Belong* challenges readers by what she calls “America’s stepchildren”—black, Latino, Southeast Asian, Native American, and white, low-income populations. She provides insight into course topics such as “Regulating social construction: Social, political perspectives”, and Establishing parameters: My perspective, your perspective, and the missing perspective”. A writer such as Jose’ Esteban Munoz, for instance, causes readers to think about the ways in which racially marginalized people practice a kind of what he calls, “disidentification” whereby they negotiate mainstream practices and thinking not by resisting them, but by transforming them for their own purposes. Finally, students will gain practice by doing cultural proficiency interpretations of cultural texts, such as film (The Freedom Writers), poetry (Angelou’s *Woman Work*), short stories (Hemingway’s *The Sea Change*), and performance music (the culture of Zydeco music).

How do the topics address the GEC category expected learning outcomes?

As mentioned previously, the course topics could cover a wide range of material. However, the topics selected were chosen to teach the learning outcomes related to the two objectives for this GEC. For example, this syllabus introduces students to the topic of “whiteness”, but does so in the context of the Critical Race Theory (another of the selected course topics). Topics address ways in which cultural proficiency studies challenge normative thinking and behavior, particularly related to race and privilege. In addition the topic, “Examining the presence and role of whiteness” addresses goal 1) Students develop abilities to analyze, appreciate, and interpret major forms of human

thought and expression, while the topic “Personal and current: What is my own cultural experience?”, is written to address goal 2) Students develop abilities to understand how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior.

How do the written assignments address the GEC category expected learning outcomes?

The course provides a great number of oral and written communication opportunities. For example, students will write weekly journal entries, opening class reflections, reflective summaries of two out-of-class lectures (at OSU’s MCC), their Book Club discussions, and their Behind the Music Popculture insight papers. They also write their own racial autobiographies, and their “I am from” poems. Contributions to class discussion are required and strategies are used for creating comfortable conditions under which students share and discuss. Students write two essays, one addressing each of the two learning outcomes for the GEC designed to assess their understanding of the concepts of the course, but also their communication and thinking through writing.

How does the course aim to sharpen students’ response, judgment, and evaluation skills?

By its very nature, cultural proficiency studies, pushes students to analyze and think critically about all kinds of information, including media transmissions, political and cultural messages, data collection methods used by various agencies, and societal assumptions and identity groups. Students will be constantly exposed, across the term to reflecting, hearing thought-provoking information, thinking, re-reflecting, and writing, all in a developmental process of sharpening their evaluative processing skills. Again, cultural proficiency studies can be challenging, and therefore often evoke a range of divergent opinions. Class discussion will involve students in opportunities to negotiate differences, and communicate skillfully with those with who they disagree. In addition, written assignments will develop response skills given the various prompts that will be used throughout the term.

GEC 4. Diversity (1) Social Diversity in the U.S. Expected Learning Outcomes

1. Students describe the roles of such categories as race, gender, class, ethnicity and religion in the pluralistic institutions and cultures of the United States.

2. Students recognize the role of social diversity in shaping their own attitudes and values regarding appreciation, tolerance, and equality of others.

How do the course goals address the GEC category learning outcomes above?

Cultural proficiency study is based on an intersectional model of social norms and power. As stated in the syllabus, this means that race, gender, sexuality, religion, and ethnicity are seen as mutually constitutive rather than as independent variables. Thus, a cultural proficiency study of any kind involves students in the complex analysis of ways in which those categories shape individuals' lives, especially in regard to normalizing practices that give social power to some while devaluing others. Such an approach will enable students to understand better the role that concepts such as appreciation, tolerance, and equality play in discourses about diversity and how they can be empowered to change attitudes they have fostered.

How do the readings assigned address the GEC category expected learning outcomes above?

This syllabus is organized around a diverse group of voices, meaning that not only diversity of opinion, but also diversity of background and identity. More than half of the authors on the syllabus are people of color writing about topics related to race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity, and sexuality. These authors, and their writings that have been selected for this class deal directly with the core issues related to the expected learning outcomes of this GEC: social in/equality and privilege -- and some provide ideas for altering those conditions.

How do the topics address the GEC category expected learning outcomes above?

The topics, "Historical contexts of Equity issues", and "The browning and aging of America", are relevant to this GEC's outcomes of describing the roles of such categories as race, gender, class, ethnicity and religion in the pluralistic institutions and cultures of the United States. The course deals with minorities of other kinds, such as ethnicity, and the normalizing practices that have organized our society and divided people into the "haves and have nots", citizens, and the "outsiders, outcasts", etc.

How do the written assignments address the GEC category expected learning outcomes above?

All assignments deal with cultural proficiency. For example, the two essay assignments provided on the syllabus are directed at these issues; one dealing with identity politics, and the other dealing with social norms. The weekly journal assignment is designed to interpret major forms of human thought and expression, because the students write about observations they are making in everyday occurrences that they are now noticing, but might not have noticed previous to the course. Their journal entries must begin with the critical thinking stems assigned each week. Their opening reflection assignment will help them understand how perceptions (a reflection of their own culture) influences their behaviors toward others, and that the cultural perspective of someone else determines that person's behavior toward them. The Book Club and Behind the Music assignments contribute toward their ability to analyze and appreciate the major forms of

human thought and expression that may or may not parallel their own perceptions. Finally, their racial autobiography and “I am from” poems help them to recognize the role of social diversity in shaping their own attitudes and values regarding appreciation, tolerance, and equality of others.

Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications

Students enrolled in a cultural proficiency course have a better confidence toward multicultural proficiency. Preservice educators, communicators, and leaders need to gain a better understanding of culture and be exposed to their cultural competence continuum. If they progress on the continuum, then they can create a better learning environment.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Future plans include creating the student course packet. The packet will use the original Woven Traditions Toolkit from which the course was grounded to compile a “textbook” that meets the general education requirements for the university. Future plans also include advertising the course through the OSU Multicultural Center, the CABS university bus system, the OSU Poverty Center, and CFAES Ambassador Facebook Page as well as other venues.

Costs/Resources Needed

The study had the usual costs associated with designing, planning and implementing a college course. For students, the Woven Traditions Toolkit, which is the curriculum and resource manual for the course, was \$200 per student (purchased by the student).

References

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